

Last Days of Persecution 135

to the most ferocious of all the persecutors,—so St. Jerome speaks of him in comparison with Decius and Maelian, •- f. favo a brief respite to the Christians in the provinces of Egypt, Cilicia, Palestine, and Syria.

" When I myself visited the East," Maximin wrote,* " a few years later, in referring to his accession, " I found that a great number of persons who might have been useful to the State had been exiled to various places by the emperors. I ordered each one of these judges no longer to press hardly upon the provincials, but rather to exhort them by kindly words to return to the worship of the gods. While my orders were obeyed by the magistrates, no one in the countries of the East was exiled or ill-treated, but the provincials, won over by kindness, returned to the worship of the gods."

Direct contradiction is given to this boast as to the number of Christian apostates by the fact that, within a twelvemonth, the new Caesar, tired of rekindling to kill Christianity by kindness and revoked his recent rescript of leniency, Maximin developed into a furious persecutor. He fell wholly under the influence of the more fanatical priests and became intensely devoted to magic, divination, and the black arts. Lactantius declares that not a joint appeared at his table which had not been taken from some victim sacrificed by a priest at an altar and drenched with the wine of libation. His edict followed edict in rapid succession, until, in the middle of 306, what Eusebius describes as "the second persecution of the Christians" was issued, which ordered every magistrate to compel

* Ku'whui-i, //tit, A.V*/<•*, ix..«).